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## The EU Strategy for Supporting Western Balkans Enlargement Process

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### Abstract

The European Union perceives itself as a successful model for regional integration which it seeks to diffuse by actively promoting the development of genuine (intra) regional economic and political cooperation, the building of issue-related regimes, creation of joint institutions for consultation and decision-making in its neighborhood and beyond as well as between the world regions and the EU. The process of Western Balkans European integration represents one of the clear manifestations of a real regional integration experiences with its growing international influence.

The European Union is seeking to repeat the success of its eastern enlargement in the Western Balkans. The Western Balkans represent a complex and diverse reality in Europe, an integral part of Europe, as well as all the countries that make up the Balkans are European countries. So the raised question is related to standardization of all European countries in political and economic organization, a strategic goal that has been clearly defined since the first day of the founding of the European Communities. Between arguments and counterarguments, Western Balkans countries are turning to the European Union to speed up their economic reconstruction, reconstruction of political road map, improve their mutual relations (long scarred by ethnic and religious wars) and consolidate their democratic institutions and their proper functionality. The main goal of this paper is to explore the achievements, ongoing actions and specifics within the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, applied model of applicability, skepticism for further Enlargement and consequences of long term existence of the enlargement. Additionally, it has been stated the essence of Negotiation process for obtaining Financial support by Institutions and project launched by the Union.

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The process of Support to the Economic stabilisation and Reforms in the Region are more than important subject, based on real applications provided by the Western Balkans candidate states. On a parallel way, in the article is elaborated the subject of free movement of people, as well as visa facilitation,

Finally, the process of Western Balkans integration and supporting process is facing the new challenge with the ongoing and completely unpredictable Refugee crises. The observations and further perspectives took part at the very late stage of the content of the Paper.

**Keywords:** European Union; Enlargement; Western Balkans European integration; supporting process.

## **1. Introduction**

The Western Balkans the existence of some common components between European Union and the countries of the Balkans like historic component as well as their historical, political and ethnic differences.

The Western Balkans region is important for Europe as a single entity bridging Central Europe with the South-East of the Old Continent, stretching to the borders of Europe at the Mediterranean Sea. The ongoing Western Balkans enlargement process is a part of already established Europe Strategy 2020 and it seems to be challenged actions of the highly filtered and selected actions.

Overall, there is a sense that Europe needs to re-establish itself with regards to the Western Balkans and that, in the face of these challenges, more of the same will not suffice. The different strategic processes in the EU and some of its member states should be an opportunity for this policy reset or new strategy. Ultimately, as local experts suggested, the future of the Western Balkans is a question that fundamentally pertains to the kind of EU that Europeans really want and to the future of the European project itself. This is a question that Europeans can no longer dodge. And, for the Western Balkans, the sooner they answer it, the better, unless they want other global powers to pre-empt their answer [1].

Europe 2020 is the EU's growth strategy for the present decade, guiding the Union towards becoming a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy in a changing world. In this context the Western Balkans enlargement countries are encouraged to associate to the Europe 2020 strategy and its flagship initiatives.

The Europe 2020 objectives are reflected, as appropriate, in the dialogues on economic policy and on employment and social policies between the Commission and enlargement countries. The Commission has guided the programming of financial assistance towards the objectives of Europe 2020, especially with respect to socio-economic development.

## **2. Applications for EU membership**

The approach towards European integration thought enlargement generally is combined of three effects:

- the magnet (market access and influence);

- anchor effects (lock-in of hard reforms, macroeconomic stability and credibility, and political anchorage of values and democracy (often after episodes of autocracy or worse) and, in some undefined but strongly perceived sense, security), and
- hegemony effects (leadership in direction, rule setting, sanctions and ambition, both political and economic, but equally the expectation of special concessions, aid and transfers).

In general terms the European Union enlargement has always been a two-way process.

The new Member States benefit from belonging to the European Union, the world's largest trading bloc and most advanced exercise in shared government. Primary, the European Union gains from extending itself into wider territories, welcoming new cultures, and thinking in to new markets. Over recent years this two-way process has taken on an additional dimension as the European Union has begun to integrate countries from the rapidly-changing the essence of the Western Balkans region. So, the candidate countries have had to introduce major reforms, economic, political and social, to qualify for EU membership.

The accession criteria, [2] or Copenhagen criteria (after the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993 which defined them), are the essential conditions all candidate countries must satisfy to become a member state. These are:

- Political criteria: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- economic criteria: a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces;
- administrative and institutional capacity to effectively implement the *acquis*\* and ability to take on the obligations of membership.

The Union's capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration

The different stages of European enlargement show that through the economic and financial crisis that hit Europe in the past few years have shifted the attention from enlargement to economic recovery of the member states, with some of them expressing concerns over the future enlargement of the EU, however it project of unification does not stop, nor slows.

Definitely, on behalf of the Union's duly authorized bodies and institutions, has been repeatedly stated by the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union that the future of the Western Balkans is within the European Union. The commitment of the European Union towards the European perspective of the Western Balkans within the new framework of the Lisbon Treaty has been reaffirmed at high-level meetings between EU officials and heads of governments from the Western Balkans.

### ***2.1. Skepticism for further Enlargement***

From one side, still there is a skepticism for entering the Western Balkan countries in the EU. These countries in the Western Balkans Region are not ready for EU membership. Their economies would not survive the competition and they would become dependent on the West. Did Balkan countries struggle to break free from Yugoslavia only to see their national independence surrendered to Brussels?

From other side there is an opposite statement.

#### Reasons for EU Enlargement

- It is the right thing

According to its treaty, the EU is based on “freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.” Shutting the door on European nations that share that commitment smacks of hypocrisy and undermines the EU’s credibility as it seeks to defend those values elsewhere in the world. Most candidates are part of a common European family shut out due by historical injustices. Once they meet democratic and economic criteria, the EU has a moral obligation to let them in.

- Export stability

Enlargement has been the EU’s most successful foreign policy tool. The lure of membership kept Central and Eastern Europe on the path of peace and democracy. Without it, historical demons could easily have re-appeared. The enlargement policy can export stability, democracy and economic well-being into a potentially disruptive neighborhood. Shutting the door on the Balkans,

- Strength in numbers

We live in a world of emerging superpowers. A bigger EU will be better placed to make its voice and its values respect.

- New blood

Successive enlargements have enriched and invigorated the European Union. Nordic countries brought traditions of openness, social justice and environmental awareness; newly free nations in Southern and Eastern Europe reminded jaded older members of the value of democracy. For the EU to remain dynamic it must remain open. Enlargement adds to the cultural diversity that is Europe’s greatest treasure [3].

The possibilities to integrate Western Balkans countries demonstrate that progress is possible where there is a political will to focus on reforms and where EU agenda is considered to be a national priority, especially when the EU enlargement process has a huge transformative leverage on the relevant countries.

## ***2.2. Long term existence of the Enlargement***

It was a sign of continuity as the Union has been steadily enlarging since 1973, when the first new Member

States joined. This was the Fifth Enlargement of the Union over a period of slightly more than thirty years. As such it was testimony to the increasing prestige of the EU and the attraction of membership to its neighbours.

At the same time, it was a new policy direction in the sense that this latest enlargement opened the way for European countries in political and economic transition from the one-party state and the planned economy to join the Union. This has proved to be a difficult but mutually beneficial step in the Union's history.

The extension of the offer of accession has led to the spread of the Union's values, laws and procedures to its neighbours and therefore has favoured a stabilisation of the neighbourhood, much to the benefit of the Union itself. This has been achieved at very little cost to the Union's members and with great benefit to both old and new member states.

The EU itself suffers from a "democratic deficit," and implementing democracy, the rule of law, human and minority rights is by no means perfect among current member states. Accelerating social and political change calls for innovation in longer-established democracies, as well as in the new democracies. Greater openness to mutual support, exchange of experience and the proliferation of the "best practice" among all member states and candidates is called for [4].

The extension of Union membership to the Western Balkans has however led to several important changes in the way in which accession is achieved. This is especially the case of the conditionality applied to candidate countries. At the same time the political environment in which enlargement is taking place has changed, making future enlargement somewhat more difficult than in the past.

### ***2.3. Negotiation process***

The negotiation process is based on strict conditionality, where each step forward is dependent on tangible progress on the ground. It is about creating a solid track record in areas such as fundamental rights and freedoms, the rule of law, good governance and democracy.

The possibilities to integrate Western Balkan countries demonstrates that progress is possible where there is a political will to focus on reforms and where the EU agenda is considered to be a national priority. Opportunities to move decisively forward on the integration path are clearly visible and equally open to all aspiring countries, which is key to the credibility of enlargement as one of the key policies of the EU [5].

Strengthening of the rule of law, improving the capacity to tackle organized crime and corruption, progress in the application of human rights and democratic standards and freedoms brings direct benefits to the citizens across Europe. Strong coordination of EU policy in the government, both in the preparation for accession and in the negotiations, is essential.

In the countries of the Western Balkans, as in all other countries, the achievement of a national objective requires strong and continuous support from the top level of the state and the government. If this support wavers, accession will drop down the table of policy priorities and preparation will falter. This may then lead to

a loss of interest in that country's accession to the Union. Strong and continuous support for accession from the highest levels of the state is therefore vital.

As one of the key conditions for accession is the complete adoption and implementation of the *Acquis Communautaire*, negotiations for accession are essentially about the timing and the conditions for the adoption of the *acquis* by the acceding country. In certain very particular circumstances it has been possible to negotiate permanent derogations from the *acquis*, but these cases over five enlargements can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

The scope for negotiating even transitional periods for the adoption of the *acquis* is limited, however. The development of a negotiating strategy requires prioritization of requests for such measures. It is essential therefore that the acceding country seriously considers the impact of the adoption of the key parts of the *acquis* on its economy and society before the negotiations open.

This will involve the use of regulatory impact assessment techniques on the most important parts of the *acquis*, especially process *acquis*. The adoption of the latter, including environmental and some social policy *acquis*, can be extremely costly to both the private and public sectors.

The negotiation will require very careful preparation by the countries of the Western Balkans. This will include close cooperation not just with interested parties at home but also with key EU Member States and Community institutions. Understanding the political economy of the negotiations will be essential to success. It is to be recommended therefore that the acceding countries cooperate closely with the European Commission and with as many of the Member States as possible and especially with those that either strongly support or strongly oppose their accession.

### **3. Enlargement process**

The European Union has made it clear on numerous occasions that the future of the Western Balkan nations lies within the Union. After the Balkan wars of the 90s, accession is seen as a guarantee of peace and stability in the region by both the Member States of the Union and by the rest countries belonging to the Western Balkan countries.

The enlargement of the European Union to twelve countries from Central and Eastern Europe was at the same time a sign of continuity and a new policy direction. It was a sign of continuity as the Union has been steadily enlarging since 1973, when the first new member states joined. This was the Fifth Enlargement of the Union over a period of slightly more than thirty years. As such it was testimony to the increasing prestige of the EU and the attraction of membership to its neighbors. It was at the same time a new policy direction in the sense that this latest enlargement opened the way for European countries in political and economic transition from the one-party state and the planned economy to join the Union. This has proved to be a difficult but mutually beneficial step in the Union's history [6].

The EU stresses the importance of peace, stability and security in this part of Europe, and welcomes all efforts

of the Western Balkan countries to come closer to the EU, meeting the necessary conditions. The Western Balkans have the potential to accelerate their course towards EU membership, provided they pursue the path of reform and reconciliation, and meet the necessary conditions. The EU is ready to assist them in this endeavour.

### **3.1. Financial assistance**

The Commission provides financial and technical support to the Western Balkans enlargement countries mainly for their preparation for accession. Assistance is provided essentially under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), under which total allocation over the period 2007-2013 is €11.6 billion. IPA streamlines all pre-accession assistance within a single framework. It places more focus on ownership of implementation by the beneficiary countries, on support for cross-border cooperation, and on "learning by doing". It prepares candidate countries to implement the regional, social, rural development and cohesion funds upon accession.

Additionally, the Multi-Annual Indicative Planning Documents (MIPDs) for the period 2011-2013 identify for each country the key sectors, according to the specific situation in each country and the progress in the accession process [7].

Special attention is devoted to the fight against corruption, development of civil society and freedom of expression.

Since 2010 the Commission has been gradually shifting financial assistance from support to individual projects to a more global, sector-wide approach, focusing on key areas of the reform agenda of the beneficiary countries.

The Governments in the Western Balkans enlargement countries are encouraged to adopt comprehensive and sustainable policies in priority sectors such as justice and home affairs, public administration, private sector development, transport, energy, environment and climate change, social development, agriculture and rural development.

In generally, the enlargement process towards Balkan region supports good governance by:

- Assessing reform progress and identifying priorities against baselines that reflect good European practice and existing EU legislation (the *Acquis Communautaire*;
- Assisting decision-makers and administrations in setting up organisations and procedures to meet European standards and good practice;
- Facilitating donor assistance from within and outside Europe by helping to design projects, ensuring preconditions and supporting implementation;
- Commission already prepared the legal framework for providing pre-accession assistance under the next multi-annual financial framework which will cover the period 2014-2020, as part of a package of instruments in the domain of external action;
- Assistance under the current IPA Regulation has proved to be efficient and effective.

### **3.2. Institutional Challenges**

Towards the process of accession, the Western Balkan countries are facing with a challenges and the process of EU integration itself should be accept as an instrument which facilitates the transitional period and helps them accelerate reforms.

This process is expected to be used in a proper manner because, as the accession countries become exposed to regional and global competition within the context of EU membership, the negative impacts of a weak economic incentive and institutional regime will be felt more acutely.

The Western Balkan countries have interest:

- to undertake activities leading towards creation of effective institutions, in order to increase capacity to cope with the competitive pressures of European integration;
- to putt forward a coherent strategic programme;
- to enchanting the stability of democratic institutions;
- to implement procedural rules and legislation in order to comply with EU standards.

### **3.3. EU Partners in figures**

The EU is the WB's largest trading partner, accounting for two thirds of the regions trade. As a whole the region share of overall EU trade was 1% in 2013, however individual countries shares were very low- Serbia 0.50%, Bosnia and Herzegovina 0,25 %, Macedonia 0,15% , Albania 0,10%, Montenegro 0,0 5 and Kosovo 0,0%.

More precisely, in 2014, the EU's main imports from Western Balkans were machinery and transport equipment (24,1%), manufactured goods classified chiefly by materials (21,1%), and miscellaneous manufactured articles (20,3%). The EU,s export to the WB were mainly machinery and transport equipment (26,9%), manufactured goods classified chiefly by material (22.3%), chemicals (15.2 %), and mineral fuels (12,3%). The exports of these countries to the EU will play a key role in it due to the free-trade access to the EU market [8].

## **4. Supporting process**

Increasing competitiveness, reducing high levels of unemployment, fostering human development and labor market participation, building infrastructure and ensuring social cohesion are major challenges throughout the Western Balkans. The EU integration process is a highly complex process which involves the design and implementation of reforms in a wide range of areas.

The experiences of new EU member states as well as those currently in various phases of their EU integration process clearly indicate that working simultaneously in many areas and making decisions about complex political, economic, legal and institutional issues with long-lasting consequences for the everyday life of citizens is far from an easy task..

The Western Balkans countries continue work towards fulfilling the Copenhagen economic criteria, which require the existence of a functioning market economy and capacity to cope with competitive pressure and



market forces in the EU. They also need to prepare for future participation in the multilateral surveillance and economic policy co-ordination procedures as part of Economic and Monetary Union.

#### **4.1. Area of Interest**

Having in mind the concrete actions Western Balkans countries are focusing to the following areas:

Legal and administrative frameworks, civil service and justice; public integrity systems;

- Public internal financial control, external audit, anti-fraud, and management of EU fund ;
- Public expenditure management, budget and treasury systems;
- Public procurement;
- Policy-making and co-ordination;
- Better regulation.

The Commission supports their efforts. The candidate countries have developed preaccession economic programmes which set out their proposals for reform. In addition, the potential candidate countries prepare annual economic and fiscal programmes which are assessed by the Commission.

A regular bilateral economic dialogue between the Commission and the respective countries is held. The Western Balkan countries may also benefit from EC macro-financial assistance. Particular emphasis will be given to state-building, rule of law, reconciliation, administrative and judicial reform, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and economic reforms, areas which the Council has stressed should be addressed at an earlier stage in the accession process.

The European Investment Bank is the largest international financier in the Western Balkans.

In line with our mandate and with the stated goal by the countries in the region to join the European Union, over the past 10 years we have signed loans of nearly EUR 7 billion for projects in this part of the world. We have helped both build and upgrade infrastructure, and, through the Western Balkans Investment Framework established in 2009, we have been able to address issues related to poor project development and to cross border coordination [9].

The European Investment Bank increased its lending to the region (from a total of €1.9 billion for 2005-2007, to an estimated €2.8 billion for the period 2008-2010). This includes lending covered by the Community budget guarantee and lending at EIB's own risk.

EIB lending activities in the Western Balkans focus primarily on projects in the areas of transport, energy, small and medium-sized enterprises, environment, municipal infrastructure, education and health.

One of the key priorities of the European Partnership Action Plan emphasises the need to “create the conditions for investment, trade, employment and economic growth for the benefit of all communities” of these countries.

#### **4.2. EU Institutions towards enlargement of Western Balkans candidate states**

On behalf of the Council and Parliament there is a list of actions that need to be taken into serious consideration, as follows:

##### **Macedonia**

Republic of Macedonia needs to meet the key priorities, which have been set as benchmarks, in order to demonstrate its readiness to undertake accession negotiations.

##### **Albania**

Albania's further progress towards the EU depends in particular on satisfactory implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, ensuring that future elections will meet international standards and strengthening the rule of law, especially the fight against corruption and organised crime.

##### **Montenegro**

Montenegro's further progress towards the EU depends on strengthening the rule of law, especially the fight against corruption and organised crime, enhancing administrative capacity and broadening the consensus on state-building. Satisfactory implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement is essential.

##### **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The EU is firmly committed to supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina and its citizens to fulfil their hopes and ambitions of making progress on their EU path. As soon as Bosnia and Herzegovina meets the outstanding conditions, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement can be signed. The Commission considers that with the necessary political will and consensus, this can be achieved soon.

##### **Serbia**

Serbia continues to sufficiently meet the political criteria. Early parliamentary elections in March confirmed the European integration aspirations of the country [10].

Additionally, Serbia has a crucial role to play in ensuring stability, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. The Commission recalls the European Council conclusions of December 2007 that progress on the road towards the EU, including candidate status, can be accelerated. It calls on Serbia to reaffirm its commitment to a future within the European Union.

##### **Kosovo**

The EU remains committed to support Kosovo's political and economic development. Kosovo has, like the rest of the Western Balkans, a clear and concrete EU perspective. To this end, the Commission will use available

instruments, in particular to promote democratic reforms, good neighbourly relations and economic progress.

The above-mentioned Western Balkans countries are facing the challenging priorities as well as:

- state building;
- good governance;
- administrative and judicial reform;
- rule of law including the fight against corruption and organised crime;
- reconciliation;
- socioeconomic development;
- civil society development.

### ***3.3. Key reform actions for the Western Balkans***

The Regional cooperation brings concrete benefits to the peoples of the Western Balkans and assists them in drawing closer to the EU. It requires continued support from the EU and will be closely monitored by the Commission., Which is estimated to be as following?

- Efforts to ensure the full participation of the Western Balkan countries in Community, programmes and agencies will be stepped up;
- Commission support to civil society development and dialogue will increase substantially;
- A new financial facility is being established to that end.
- Coordination with International Financial Institutions, in particular the EIB and the EBRD, and with bilateral donors will be stepped up in order to mobilise grants and loans for modernisation and development.

The Commission, the EIB, the EBRD and the Council of Europe Development Bank committed to establish a Western Balkans Investment Framework by 2010 with other IFIs and donors. A Western Balkans Infrastructure Initiative is being launched by the Commission and a number of IFIs and bilateral donors.

### ***4.3. Institutional support***

Why should Western Balkan countries undertake activities leading towards the creation of effective institutions?

- First, for the countries of the Western Balkans it is crucial to increase their capacity to cope with the competitive pressures of European integration by putting forward a coherent strategic programme for strengthening human capital adapted to the needs of their changing labor markets, by improving the quality of education, educational training, including lifelong learning;
- Second, the stability of democratic institutions is one of the conditions of accession to the European Union ;
- Third, the EU integration process requires professional teams to manage the accession process because the conditionality is based on implementing procedural rules and legislation in order to comply with EU

standards [11].

#### **4.4. Strategic adjustment or desperation**

The new Balkan approach is a combination of slow EU integration along with a search for new loans and investment from the East. Last year, Turkey was among the top three foreign investors in Croatia and Serbia, and among the top five in Bosnia. The Serbian government is courting new loans from Russia and Asia as it needs \$6 billion this year to service its debt (25% more than in 2012).

Such diversification of investment partnerships, now common across the region, reflects larger shifts in the global economy, but also shows a degree of desperation. In any case, it will make the EU a less dominant partner than before. Although the EU is still referred as the “indispensable power” in the region, it might have to struggle more to impose its agenda in the near future.

It is expected that deeper crisis could bring the Balkans region closer to Europe, but only if the EU keeps its door open and reframes the enlargement agenda in economic terms, as a credible blueprint for sustainable growth and new jobs. More than new strategies, however, we first need to renew something fundamental as well as the ethos of shared responsibility, of Europe for the Western Balkans and of the Balkan countries for themselves.

#### **5. Free movement and familiarizing people with the EU**

Promoting people-to-people contacts between the Western Balkans and the EU is of paramount importance, the reason more for the citizens from the region to acquire a better knowledge of the European Union, its values, rules, and way of life. Contacts between the people of the Western Balkan countries help reconciliation. The European Council has emphasized the importance of people-to-people contacts and invited the Commission to take initiatives to promote them, in particular in the areas of visas.

Visa-free travel to the EU is of considerable importance to the people of the Western Balkans. Moving towards a visa-free regime is part of the preparations for EU membership and at the same time, steps towards liberalization of travel need to take into account the internal security and migration interests of the EU. They are, therefore, conditional on necessary reforms by the Western Balkan countries.

In respect of the strengthened post-visa liberalization monitoring mechanism it is important to be stressed that the dialogue between the Commission and the Western Balkan countries concerning the visa-free travel scheme takes place under the stabilization and association process and in the framework of accession negotiations on chapters 23 and 24.

Commission officials visited Albania in April 2014, Bosnia and Herzegovina in May, July and November 2014, the Republic of Macedonia in November 2013, Montenegro in February, March, July and October 2014, and Serbia in February 2014 [12].

Free movement of goods, capital, services and citizens is a platform for operationalization of the provisions from the Lisbon Treaty. The issue of achieving visa-free travel to the EU is of the highest importance to the citizens of all the enlargement partners and is part of the accession process. However, steps towards liberalisation are subject to the countries concerned meeting conditions that safeguard the internal security and migration policy interests of the EU. The Western Balkan citizens have been granted the status for free movements through boundaries.

### **5.1. Visa application and mobility**

As a first step towards visa liberalization, the Commission has negotiated *visa facilitation* agreements with the Western Balkan countries. These were signed in September 2007 and entered into force on 1 January 2008. The Western Balkan countries and the Member States ensured proper implementation of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements.

The Commission is taking steps towards preparing for *visa liberalization* with the Western Balkans and announced its intention to start a dialogue with each country with a view to establishing road-maps on the conditions to be met for lifting the visa requirement.

## **6. Refugee crisis**

The European Union pledged to help set up 100,000 places in reception centres along the refugee route through the Balkans, in a bid to defuse the rising tensions on its eastern frontier as tens of thousands pass through on their way to northern Europe. One of the key elements of the plan is to speed up information exchanges between countries to coordinate their efforts.

More than 670,000 people have reached European soil this year, many of them fleeing violence in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, in the continent's worst migration crisis since World War II. Some 3,000 have died making the dangerous Mediterranean sea crossing and, with winter fast approaching, the fear is that more could face the same fate on the land route through the Balkans [13].

According to the statement of the Slovenian Prime Minister in reference to the comments ahead of the summit that the EU would start "falling apart" without immediate, concrete actions, it has been added that "It is crucial that commitments are fulfilled in practice." "In such a case, we continue along the path that I referred to at my arrival".

Tensions have also grown after Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia warned over the weekend they could close their borders to stop them becoming a "buffer zone" for the streams of people entering Europe every day.

In case of Macedonian involvement into the crisis, it has been stressed by Macedonian President warned that his tiny Balkan nation, a key transit state, could host a maximum of 2,000 refugees if crossing points were shut down. Additionally, the President said Macedonia had "no financial aid" and suffered from "a lack of valuable information" as it was not an EU Member. The EU's new reception places, to be provided with the help of the

United Nations' refugee agency, the UNHCR, will help provide shelter and speed up registration of refugees. Some 50,000 places will be created across Balkan countries such as Macedonia and Serbia, while the other half will be located in Greece.

### **6.1. Countries overwhelmed**

Most refugees land first in Greece but, desperate to get to Germany and wealthier northern European countries, thousands have pushed on rather than staying there to have their asylum applications processed as is required under EU rules. Moving up through the Balkans they have overwhelmed many countries, with Hungary sealing border crossings with Serbia and then Croatia to halt the flow into the country.

According to the Croatian Prime is clear that that Brussels' plan for bolstered help from the EU border agency Frontex could also help to control the situation, but he too had reservations. Fears are rising that the crisis is threatening the cherished Schengen system of borderless travel, one of the bedrock achievements of the EU since it was founded in the chaos following World War II.

The German Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that *"This is one of the greatest litmus tests Europe"*.

There is a clear split in the EU over how to best handle the crisis. Some view it mainly as a border security problem, while others believe it is a humanitarian challenge. The future in European Union is unpredictable.

## **7. Recommendations**

In real perception there are some policy recommendations to the EU institutions that could reinvigorate the accession process of the Western Balkans, regardless of the need for sincere reforms in the aspiring Member States, as follows:

- Empower Democratic Forces in the Regions;
- Remove Bilateral Disputes from the Accession Agenda;
- Reenergize the Enlargement Process;
- Closely Monitor the State of Democracy ;
- IPA.

The European Parliament has a direct influence through its budgetary powers on the amounts allocated to the aspiring Member States. Step up European Parliament's involvement in the mediation of disputes involving a (potential) candidate and a Member State. Bilateral issues become all the more difficult to address once they oppose a Member State and a candidate country, weakening the potential for productive involvement by most of the EU actors.

## **8. Conclusions**

### **8.1. Achievements**

The EU enlargement process towards Western Balkans is launched and strictly legally supported by the Institutional mechanism reached through communication from the Commission to the European parliament, the Council, the European economic and social committee and the Committee of the Regions.

The Commission has strengthened the credibility of Enlargement policy and enhanced its transformative power by ensuring a stronger focus on addressing fundamental reforms early in the enlargement process [14].

In general, the Commission has put particular emphasis on the three pillars of rule of law, economic governance and public administration reform.

More precisely, in its Enlargement Strategy Communication in 2012 the Commission introduced a new approach to rule of law [15].

Further, in its 2013 Communication, the Commission set out a framework for strengthening economic governance, drawing on the experience of the European Semester [16].

In 2014 the Commission sets out new ideas to support public administration reform in the enlargement countries. These three pillars are interlinked and progress in these areas will be key to determining when countries will be fully ready to join the EU.

The EU's Enlargement policy contributes to mutual benefits of peace, security and prosperity in Europe. It reinforces the EU's political and economic strength and has a powerful transformative effect on the countries concerned. A well prepared accession process ensures enlargement is not at the expense of the effectiveness of the Union.

## **8.2. Needs and recommendations**

Western Balkans Region is facing with the new challenges. The accession process remains slow and the remaining aspirants are unlikely to enter the EU as soon as possible. In addition to an increasingly demanding conditionality, Member States seem to be intervening more often with the integration process, often delaying in predictable ways. More specifically, in practice there is a scenario for the future of EU enlargement towards the Balkans. [17].

### **Scenario 1: Business in place**

This entails the continuation of the gradual and slow approach to EU membership, based on enhanced conditionality, a strong focus on the rule of law during the accession process, and new means of engaging with countries in impasse. So far, this approach has failed to fully unlock some countries on their EU tracks.

### **Scenario 2: Abandoning Enlargement and New Unpredictability in the Western Balkans**

This scenario extends the risks of the previous scenario with enlargement grinding to a standstill. As accession becomes unlikely due to continued internal crisis in the EU and opposition to further enlargement, alternative

actors might become engaged in the Western Balkans.

### Scenario 3: The Balkans Big Bang

This scenario would see the acceleration of integration, including the start of accession talks with all countries of the Balkans and the offer of a single entry date, as happened in the case of the Central and East European enlargement. Instead of increased conditionality, which is particularly hard to fulfill by countries plagued by statehood issues (such as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo), this approach would focus again on the acquis itself, and require substantial EU engagement to resolve disputes that currently hinder accession.

### Scenario 4. Current Refugee Crisis and unpredictable future

This entails the continuation of the gradual and slow approach to EU membership, based on enhanced conditionality, a strong focus on the rule of law during the accession process, and new means of engaging with countries in impasse.

Besides all above mentioned challenges, difficulties, unpredictability events, the EU concept has a strong future based on solid platform made by the Western Balkans countries, simply because the region deserves a better life and prosperity for the current and next generations.

The EU needs a comprehensive strategy of integrating the Western Balkans into the European mainstream [18].

In the Western Balkans, European Union Strategy thus operates within an environment of competition with alternative international factors and models of development. This makes it more difficult for the EU member states to assist transformation and facilitate the integration of the Western Balkans into the bloc. The success of the Western Balkans' EU accession is needed as a part of the overall success of Europe to establish itself as a viable and powerful global factor in the world of today and tomorrow.

The authors [19] in their research noted that there is a sense that Europe needs to re-establish itself with regards to the Western Balkans and that, in the face of these challenges, more of the same will not suffice.

The different strategic processes in the EU and some of its member states should be an opportunity for this policy reset or new strategy. In real perception there are some policy recommendations to the EU institutions that could reinvigorate the accession process of the Western Balkans, regardless of the need for sincere reforms in the aspiring Member States, as follows:

- Empower Democratic Forces in the Regions;
- Remove Bilateral Disputes from the Accession Agenda;
- Reenergize the Enlargement Process;
- Closely Monitor the State of Democracy;
- IPA.



Ultimately, the future of the Western Balkans is a question that fundamentally pertains to the kind of EU that Europeans really want and to the future of the European project itself. This is a question that Europeans can no longer dodge. And, for the Western Balkans, the sooner they answer it, the better, unless they want other global powers to pre-empt their answer.

### ***8.3. The future of the Western Balkans***

The process of successfully integration into EU infrastructure is more than serious issue concerning all Western Balkans countries.

The Candidate states need to complete at least four major aspects of transition.

First, the countries from the region need to complete the process of post-communist transition, related to the establishment and consolidation of functional democratic institutions, capable of catering services to the community of citizens and of generating stability, security and prosperity for their nations.

Second, the societies of the Western Balkans need to finalize the process of post-conflict recovery, which is a key condition for the rebuilding of efficient national institutions reflecting the will of an integrated civil national community.

Third, the countries of the region need to mobilize their human and institutional potential in order to successfully complete the process of societal, economic and political modernization. All countries on the Balkans harbor uneasy amalgams of traditional and modern society which keep clashing, in a series of painful memories throughout the contemporary history of the region.

Forth, a final success of the modernization of the region is indispensable in order to provide stable chances for development and peaceful resolution of traditional conflicts shaking the Balkan region for more than a century.

Balkanization is in effect a long-term crisis of modernization. Most vices that plague the successful development of all Balkan countries relate to unfinished modernization: large scale organized crime, founded on the clan structures of traditional society; high-level corruption, stemming from civil society weakness and models of patrimonial functioning of the state; and intense use of religion and identity as a means to national consolidation and “greatness”.

Successful modernization presumes a hegemony of democratic and reformist elites in politics and society. Fourth, the Western Balkan nations need to merge into the mainstream of the post-national European architecture, aimed at uniting different national communities under the values of interdependency and plurality of identities.

It is obvious for any unprejudiced observer that the Balkan region could not successfully cope with all four challenges of transition without strategic assistance from the European Union [20].

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